

THE DANGERS OF OUR COUNTRY, AND THE MEANS OF AVERTING THEM.

7

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN MARLBOROUGH, MASS.,

ON THE DAY OF THE

ANNUAL STATE FAST,

April 7, 1842.

BY GEORGE E. DAY,

Pastor of the Union Church and Society in Marlborough.

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MARLBOROUGH, APRIL 20, 1842.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

The Sermon you delivered before your Society on the last Fast Day, having made a very favorable impression, the undersigned, in compliance with instructions from them, would solicit a copy for the press.

Yours very respectfully,

N. B. PROCTOR,
NATHANIEL LONGLEY, } Committee.
HOLLIS LORING,

REV. GEORGE E. DAY.

MARLBOROUGH, APRIL 21, 1842.

MESSRS. N. B. PROCTOR, NATHANIEL LONGLEY, and HOLLIS LORING,

GENTLEMEN,—Under existing circumstances, I do not feel at liberty to decline complying with your request for a copy of the Discourse delivered before you on the last Fast Day. It would give me pleasure, did time permit, to endeavor by enlargement and revision, to render it more worthy of your acceptance. As it is, I can only hope that the general principles advanced in it, may command themselves to the young men of this town.

With sincere regard,

Yours truly,

GEORGE E. DAY.

D I S C O U R S E.

PROVERBS xiv. 34.

RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION, BUT SIN IS A REPROACH TO ANY PEOPLE.

It is not to be concealed that the crisis of our nation's destiny is at hand. It is evident to every eye, that the current of public iniquity, unless soon turned back, must end in national infamy and ruin. Within the last few months, there has been developed in this country, a state of things without a parallel in the annals of our civil existence. The dangers of our land, which for years have awakened the apprehensions of reflecting minds, have lately increased and multiplied, until our peril is now obvious to the most unthinking. When before was disunion, among the sons of the Pilgrims, openly talked of and defended? When before, has the conflict between the jarring interests of different sections of the country been so deadly and so appalling? When were the perils which encircle us so numerous and so imminent as now? When did it ever appear less unlikely that the existence of the American Union might begin and end within the life-time of a single individual?

When the ship is driving upon the breakers, it is time to raise the cry of alarm; and certainly, now, if ever, is the time—and no day can be more appropriate than that set apart by civil authority for fasting, humiliation and

prayer—to call your attention to *the most prominent dangers which threaten our country, and the true means of averting them.*

Look, then, in the first place, at *the high handed violations of common honesty*, on a great scale, which the last few months have witnessed. To say nothing of the Bankrupt law—the morality of which, in publicly and by legal enactment freeing large numbers of men from the civil obligation to pay their just debts, is in the view of many more than doubtful—what a stupendous scheme of fraud has recently been disclosed in the management of the great banking corporation of the country. The reckless expenditures, the mad speculations, the ruinous extravagance of that mammoth institution, and the dishonest exemption from accountability on the part of its managers and directors, are now, in the pressure of other things, almost effaced from the public mind: but a generation must pass, before the suffering occasioned by that great fraud will be forgotten by the multitudes of widows and orphans, whose hard earned wages or little patrimonies, laid by for the day of sickness and old age, have been swept away at a stroke, consigning them to poverty and despair. When immense sums, equal in amount to the revenues of a kingdom, are squandered in speculation and trade, and no account can be given of them, such conduct should be called by its right name. Insulted morality, the laws of the Bible, and the welfare of the community demand the plain and fearless exposure, and justify the open and severe rebuke of public indignation.

Worse still is the infamous doctrine, shamelessly avowed and acted upon in high places, that a State, when unable or unwilling to meet the demands occasioned by its own extravagant speculations, may repudiate its obligations, or in other words, refuse to pay its honest debts, and become, in plain language, a corporate villain. Neither France, in the darkest days of her atheism and crime; nor degraded

Spain, in the midst of civil distraction and extreme poverty; nor the South American States, in the perpetual whirl of revolution and intestine discord; nor any nation or people ever heard of, calling itself civilized, has dreamed of exonerating itself from the obligations of common honesty. It has been left—to our shame be it spoken—to the enlightened States of this confederacy, in the glory of republican freedom, and with fulness of bread in all our borders, to discover that a change of administration is a full quit claim for all debts the State does not choose to pay! What wonder that our fair name is, for a generation at least, hopelessly sullied? What wonder that in Europe our public faith has received a shock which renders American securities, on the stock exchange, a by-word and a laughing stock? What wonder that this young republic is in deepest peril of becoming the unhappy object of opprobrium and scorn throughout the civilized world?

Infamy abroad is the sure penalty of dishonesty at home; and well will it be, if the consequences end there. Well will it be for this nation, if a great increase of individual dishonesty, and a general suspicion in the walks of trade, are not the first fruits of the wholesale immorality and crime of corporate bodies. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

Look, in the second place, at *the general forgetfulness of the public good, in the councils of the nation, under the influence of blind devotion to party interests.* The people, to a great extent, elected their rulers on the ground of their partisan faithfulness. They inquired little about their intellectual and moral fitness. They asked not and appeared to care not, whether they were good citizens and good men. They only asked about their political sentiments and their political availability;—and truly they have their reward. "Every thing for party—nothing for the country," has apparently been the motto of nearly all in high places. With our finances embarrassed, trade and

commerce laboring under the greatest discouragements—our national defences altogether inadequate for security in the event of a serious collision with a foreign power, all calling for prompt attention, what one thing has been accomplished in the great deliberative council of the nation, the past winter, to render relief? In what one measure have all united, with common zeal, to promote the common welfare? We hear a great deal of “our party,” and “our principles,” but very little, of *our country and its urgent wants*. The truth is, our legislators, to a lamentable extent, are under the control of party feelings, and think less of the public good than of party triumphs. And such will always be the case so long as nothing higher than political orthodoxy is looked for as a qualification for offices of trust. **IS HE A GOOD MAN—IS HE HONEST, MORAL, INDEPENDENT?**—had these questions been asked, and these qualities been made the test of fitness for the exalted dignity of ruling a free people, we should have heard less of the daily brawls and confusion in the halls of Congress, which are drawing upon us the wondering eyes of all nations, and much more, of solid, judicious plans to render us prosperous at home, and respected abroad.

Another alarming feature of the times is, *an increasing indifference to crime, and an unwillingness to inflict the appropriate penalties it deserves*. Whether this arises from the increased familiarity with scenes of violence and blood, occasioned by the general perusal of the weekly and daily journals, or from the latent and open infidelity in the land, or from both causes combined, it may be difficult to say. That the latter cause has somewhat to do with it, however, can admit of but little doubt. Infidelity, in every age, has been noted for underrating and disparaging law. In its frantic efforts to overthrow the law of God and the dread sanctions which sustain it, it espouses principles directly subversive of all law and of all wise restraint. Hence, the close connection between infidelity

in religion, and anarchy in government. Hence, revolutionary France, in disowning the law of God and the sanctions which uphold it, lost, at the same time, all just appreciation of the necessity of firm civil law, and its righteous maintenance in the State. The dignified administration of justice, thenceforth ceased; the careful discrimination between the innocent and the guilty was no longer heard of, but in its stead, arose the gratification of malignant and revengeful passion, and the scenes of savage cruelty which followed in its train.*

* It is worthy of note, that Robespierre's celebrated speech in the National Assembly, on the *total abolition of capital punishment*, in which he dared to call the just execution of the law *revenge* and *murder*, was delivered only a little more than a year before the heart-sickening massacre of several thousand prisoners (Sept. 2d and 3d, 1792.) by the blood-thirsty populace. How much the horrors of the French revolution had to do, in the way of cause and effect, with those ill-timed debates, it is left for others to decide. The "sacredness of human life" has a meaning to the vicious part of the community, which they are by no means backward in understanding. Assure them that in the perpetration of any crime, their lives are safe—make them certain that under no possible circumstances shall their own earthly existence pay the forfeit of taking that of others, and they can scarcely ask for more. The *humanity* and *philanthropy* of freeing the ill-disposed from the highest restraints, thereby occasioning an increase of murder, and a general sense of insecurity in the unoffending community, is about on a par with the arguments employed in support of the measure. To say that "man has no right to take life, because he cannot give it," is not only to set at naught the authority of the divine enactment, explicitly made for the human race in all ages and under all circumstances, (Gen. 9 : 6.) incorporated into the code which God gave to Moses, (Num. 35 : 16—19, 31.) and recognized with approbation in the New Testament, (Acts 25 : 11. Rom. 13 : 4.) but also to deny the rightfulness of self protection, defensive war, and all civil government! Non resistance and infidelity on this point, go hand in hand.

The few cases adduced, to show the policy of wholly abolishing capital punishment—which, even if well authenticated, would only prove the *possible safety* of such a course—the author is satisfied, after a careful examination, are either destitute of authority, or erroneously represented, or accompanied by such circumstances as to render them of no value to the cause in behalf of which they are cited. The single fact that, in every country in which the experiment of abolishing capital punishment has been tried, it has, with perhaps a single exception, again been incorporated into the criminal code, is worth a thousand arguments. It is an encouraging sign—and it may be hoped betokens our speedy return to a healthy state of public sen-

It is evident that a process somewhat similar to this is already at work among us, although as yet we are only in the incipient stages. The testimony of men of the soundest judgment and of full opportunities for observation is, that there exists in the community an alarming reluctance to convict criminals, and that, not merely of the crime of murder, but of *any* crime, except upon evidence, which in the great majority of cases can never be obtained. Men who are about to commit a felony, like to have as few eye witnesses as possible, and are generally careful not to perpetrate it in the broad light of day ; and therefore, to refuse to convict, except upon the testimony of an eye witness, is in fact to offer a premium to crime and to patronize iniquity.

How common, too, *sympathy with the guilty* has become—not that Christian sympathy which seeks to perform all acts of kindness to the criminal which the *good of the community* will admit of—but that *felon sympathy*, which, in sickly compassion for the criminal, overlooks and palliates the enormity of the crime, and takes part with the guilty against the innocent, the injurer against the injured, every one knows. Let this process go on a few years longer ; let the number of such sentimentalists be increased ; let the law be decried and slandered ; let its just execution be called revenge and murder ; let its officers, from the judge on the bench to the sheriff who executes the sad mandate of the law, be looked upon as blood thirsty wretches, and it requires no prophet's eye to foresee, that the torch of the incendiary, gleaming on the

timent—that many of the most influential papers, political and religious, have recently spoken out in decisive terms in favor of the existing law. The Boston Recorder aptly termed the bill introduced into the New York Legislature to abolish the punishment of death for all crimes, *murder included*, and to substitute therefor imprisonment for life, **AN ACT TO ABOLISH THE DIVINE LAW**. Happily it has not passed. After the most energetic efforts to carry it through, it has just been rejected by a vote of 55 to 45. *The true way to abolish capital punishment, is to get rid of the crimes which render it necessary.*

darkness of midnight, and the dagger of the assassin, invading the sanctuary of our homes, will soon tell of the final prostration of all law—of the peaceful citizen delivered over to the tender mercies of the robber and murderer—of scenes of terror which will make the most stout hearted quail, and render life itself a burden.

In the monarchies of the old world, where standing armies are always in readiness to restrain the out-breaking of crime, there is less ground for apprehension from a perverted state of public sentiment; but, in this land, where nothing but the law and its just execution constitute the protection of the community against the evil-minded, an unwillingness to execute its deserved penalties, is fraught with imminent danger to the well-disposed, and can only be regarded with the most lively apprehension and serious alarm.

Look, in the fourth place, at *the increasing evils and dangers which within a short time have sprung from the continuance of negro slavery*, and which every year serves only to inflame and aggravate. There can be no question that in every section of the country, there has been to a great extent, a culpable indifference to the enormous sin of holding human beings in the condition of the brutes that perish;—robbing them of their just wages, and sealing against them the word of life. There has been, too extensively, a heartless carelessness in respect to their wants and woes, and a preference of peace and quiet rather than a fearless advocacy of right and truth and conscience.

But the cry of the oppressed has entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and He is now causing us to feel *for ourselves*, if we will not feel for the suffering. Our dearest rights trampled under foot; the halls of Congress turned into a great arena of abuse and faction; trade and commerce languishing; insolvency in individuals and insolvency in States; the prosperity of the country at a

stand, if not absolutely retrograding, are the undeniable fruits of holding men in wicked bondage, against the laws of nature and the obligations of religion.

To begin with the last:—every one will recollect the terrible commercial convulsion which occurred five or six years since, and from which we have not yet by any means recovered. The politicians told us it arose from political causes. One party laid the whole blame upon the great banking corporation of the country, and the other party claimed that the calamity would never have occurred, had not that corporation been improperly meddled with. Time has made it evident that both were wrong. The real cause lay far deeper than either of the parties were willing to suppose. For many years, the world, for the most part, had been at peace, and the wearied nations were permitted to cultivate its arts. During this period, England, with her immense machinery, creating by the power of steam the labor of one hundred millions of men, had become the workshop of all lands, and was able to consume in the manufacture of cotton fabrics, nearly the entire annual crop of the staple of the South. Cotton, raised by the reluctant labor of unpaid slaves, was in brisk demand; wealth poured in upon us like a flood; and the merchant, the manufacturer, the artizan of the North, in participating in the golden harvest, winked at the iniquity which caused its growth.

The delusive prosperity of that sad period will not soon be forgotten. Money was common. Wealth was of easy acquisition. Honest industry was extensively forsaken, and shorter roads to wealth were crowded with eager adventurers and confident projectors of vast and promising schemes. Extravagance in dress and living became the order of the day. “Living within the means,” that old fashioned virtue, which once made a man respectable and respected, fell into contempt, and in the larger cities, more especially, vast sums were annually squandered in articles

of luxury and extravagance, and families supported more in the princely style of the worn-out aristocracies of Europe, than in that befitting a plain and republican land. This unnatural inflation could not long endure. The bubble burst. The multiplied causes which regulate the connection between supply and demand, and which are nearly as much beyond the reach of human calculation as the great revolutions which occur in nature, occasioned a fall in the price of cotton, and the delusion was at an end. Immense debts, contracted in the delirium of success, were now to be paid with diminished and constantly diminishing resources. No wonder that bankruptcies became of every day occurrence—blunting the moral sense of the community, and spreading dismay upon every countenance. No wonder that banking institutions were obliged to break their promises, and finally in great numbers sink down in the general calamity.

The immediate pressure has passed away; but the relics of that wide-spread catastrophe are still apparent in the hopeless poverty of thousands, and in a style of extravagant living, both in town and country, not less unwise in point of personal and national economy, than unnecessary for respectability and useless for comfort. When the history of the commercial distress of the last few years shall be written, the sin and shame of negro slavery will occupy a conspicuous place on its pages, and be another commentary upon the inspired passage—“Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”

A deadly disease cannot long remain in the system, without manifesting itself. If apparently quieted for a time, it is only gathering strength to break forth with increased malignity. So it has been with the evils engendered by southern slavery. It now requires the interests of the whole country—the livelihood of the industrious artizans and manufacturers of the north and west,

who are willing to earn their living by their own honest toil—to be sacrificed to its perpetuation and support. To accomplish this, it is struggling with the energy of despair upon the floor of Congress, and demanding that the hard-working laborers of the other sections of the country shall help to support the white population of the south, in a life of luxurious idleness. For, what else than this is a fair statement of the great question—agitated for so many years, and exciting deeper and still deeper feeling—respecting protective duties upon articles of domestic manufacture? Let me say a word by way of explanation.

The great problem in a community where slavery exists, is to find out a way—in defiance of the clearest principles of political economy—by which one half, more or less, of the population may live in complete idleness, and be supported by the industry of the other half. Now, obviously, such a state of things, being opposed to the established laws of nature, which ordain that society shall prosper only by the combined labor, mental and physical, of all its component parts, each a helper to all the others, cannot, even temporarily, exist, unless the produce there raised bring a high and disproportionate price. So long as the produce of one man's work at the south can be made to be worth as much in the market as the produce of two men's work at the north, the master can live in idleness, and be supported by the labor of his slave, along with the slave himself,—but not a day longer. Now in order that cotton may bring a high price in the European market, and thus *support both master and slave by the labor of only one of them*, it is necessary that there be a *ready sale for the fabrics into which this cotton is made*. To shut up the ports of any country against these fabrics, or, what amounts to the same thing, to lay such duties on them as certainly to prevent their importation, is, in fact, to produce a decrease in the demand for the raw cotton, and thus to lower its price. No wonder, therefore, that

such a clamor is raised in the southern section of the country against a protective system, which, by shutting out in a measure, foreign manufactures, would be in effect to diminish the value of slave labor. No wonder the demand is made that every yard of cotton cloth we wear, be spun on foreign spindles, and wove in foreign looms.

On the contrary, the northern manufacturer, and with him, the *mechanic*, who erects his buildings and provides his machinery ; the *farmer*, whose produce is wanted for the support of his workmen ; the *merchant* who provides them with articles of apparel and consumption, have *their* interests lying in precisely the opposite direction. Instead of having the home market open, so that the foreign manufacturer, who has to pay but one half or one quarter the wages to his workmen that labor brings in this country, shall undersell him, by reason of being able to manufacture at a cheaper rate, it is for the interest of these classes, which together constitute nearly the whole of the community, to exclude this ruinous competition by such a duty on imported goods as shall more than compensate for the difference in wages, and thus render the foreign article dearer to the consumer. This, in the actual state of the world is nothing else than simple self-protection. If this is not rendered, the manufactures of the country must languish and be annihilated, before the cheap labor of the half-starved countries of the old world. And yet, this is what slavery insists shall not be done. Not content with wringing from those in servitude their just wages, it demands that the working classes at the north contribute to its support by the poverty of their families, and the stagnation of business in all the walks of trade.

Here is the secret of the deadly hostility between the interests of free and slave labor, which, interweaving itself by a thousand ramifications into every question of public policy, has come at last to constitute the great question of the country and the age. Not a project is started in the

councils of the nation, in any way touching the matter of revenue or finance, but it is sure to end in this. The main difficulty—the dreadful plague-spot which makes all the trouble—is becoming more and more evident every day, and threatens, unless Providence avert the danger, to involve us in the horrors of intestine discord. It is only righteousness that exalteth a nation: sin is a reproach, and, in the long run, an injury and loss to any people.

Slavery is the relic of a dark and barbarous age. It is at war with the liberal institutions and free spirit of modern times—at war with the literature of the world—at war with the hopes and aspirations of the human mind—at war with the progress of civilization and civil freedom—at war with the word of God. Every day renders the greatness of the calamity with which we are afflicted more and more manifest. Not satisfied with being at the bottom of a large part of the trouble we have at home, it seems bent on plunging the land of Hancock and Adams into a desolating conflict with the mightiest monarchy in Europe, in defence of the monstrous claim that domestic bondage shall not only be recognized upon the high seas, but upheld by the active participancy of other nations—when notoriously it is only a local institution, existing in defiance of all justice, by the law of brute force, and liable to be subverted at any moment, whenever power enough can be gained by the injured to accomplish their deliverance.

All sin is followed by a train of disastrous consequences, and it is never possible to tell when or where these consequences will stop. To this remark the sin of slaveholding forms no exception. It has occasioned, as we have seen, a bloated prosperity, a ruinous extravagance, a contempt of sober industry, and in the reflux of the tide has poured bankruptcy, dismay and poverty upon us: it has excited and is destined to excite most bitter contention

between the parties interested in free and in slave labor, and is ever at hand to fan the embers of discord. But the catalogue of the evils it engenders is not yet completed. Who does not know—who that has New England blood running in his veins has not heard with indignation that the right of petition—as much the inheritance of every freeman as the air he breathes—is now sacrificed upon the altar of slavery ? Who does not know, that not a man in the land, no matter how estimable, exalted, wise, or good, may exercise the privilege, never denied to the veriest serf of the Autocrat, or the cringing slave of the Grand Seignor, of asking for redress of grievances ? Who does not know that his birth-right is torn from him and systematically trampled in the dust ? And to crown the whole :—The ink is hardly yet dry upon the papers which brought the astonishing intelligence that a Representative in Congress, from one of the largest and most flourishing States in the Union, in the exercise of his legitimate functions expressing his opinion of the true meaning and intent of the Constitution in respect to slavery upon the high seas, has been censured and reprimanded in all the formalities of deliberative resolutions, for the crime of differing in opinion from the majority, and daring to express his own views ! Unless this iniquitous decision is reversed by the stern voice of public rebuke, *freedom of speech* has followed the fate of the right of petition. Domestic bondage, every body knows, is incompatible with the rights of the enslaved. We have now to learn that it is incompatible with the rights of the free. The tyranny of censuring a free representative of a free people for the crime of expressing his honest sentiments, it has been left to the “peculiar institutions” of republican America in the nineteenth century to enact and perpetrate. Truly, sin is a reproach—a shame and disgrace, to any people.

Having thus taken a rapid view of the more prominent dangers of our country, let us now seek for the true means

of averting them. It is not *a dissolution of the Union*. This confederacy of States might be broken into two, or six, or even into twenty fragments, and yet not a single evil be remedied, nor a single danger averted.

Nor is it to *give ourselves up to the blind impulses of passionate indignation*. That only makes matters worse. The hurricane lashes the deep into foam, but it does not bear the bark securely into port. When the fierce passions of the human heart are excited, nobody, in a general way, is either convinced or made better.

Nor does the remedy consist, *in forming specific associations* for the purpose of averting these dangers, and suppressing these evils. It is certainly a very great evil that the State of Mississippi, for example, will not recognize and pay her honest debts; but it is not exactly easy to see how we should help the matter, by forming ourselves into a society for the suppression of legislative dishonesty. Indeed, human nature being what it is, would it be possible to take a step better fitted than this to defeat our own wishes? Would not the very fact that we had organized societies and associations, be regarded under the circumstances as a sort of declaration of war, or at least, as a conspiracy against their interests and good name, and be likely in the end, by the irritation it occasioned, to do more harm than good? Is not the sum total of the direct influence we can exert exhausted, if, each one speaking to his neighbor in strong disapproval of this gross dishonesty, the public prints catch the echo of the popular voice, and bear to the South-West the verdict of New England sentiment, that villainy is villainy, whether perpetrated by an individual or a commonwealth?

Nor does the remedy appear to be, *the formation of another political party*. We have parties enough, and more than enough, already. What we want is *free men*, honest, unshackled, independent freemen, who will uphold the great principles of truth and righteousness,

and vote for good men, wherever they can find them, rather than for mere party tools.

The means of our deliverance are pointed out in the text:—"righteousness exalteth a nation." Adherence to the unbending precepts of moral and religious obligation constitutes the strength and prosperity of a land. And if the waves begin to rise, and the storm to howl, and the rocks crested with foam are seen in the distance, the only hope of safety is found in instant return to the everlasting principles of truth and duty. Thus proud Nineveh was saved. Thus may our nation yet be a glorious monument of God's sparing goodness. *Wide spread and frequent revivals of religion are the only hope of our land.* When religious truth in its life-giving power shall take strong hold of great masses of our countrymen, we shall hear less of corporate dishonesty, less of the sickly compassion of felon sympathy, less of reckless party subserviency, and more of the honor of God, and the great principles by which his cause is to be advanced in this revolted world. We shall hear, too, the noise of jarring interests hushed in the peaceful affection begotten by the energies of Christian love. We shall hear the chains of the down-trodden captive falling off, and the glad song of freedom ringing over the hills and vales, and sweetly uniting with the voice of thanksgiving and praise for deliverance from the house of bondage. Religion alone can save us. To this only should we trust for security. Let the silent Word be placed under every roof; let the living voice be heard within all our borders to explain and enforce its teachings; let the home missionary be sent into every neglected corner; let the prayer of faith be put up in its mighty efficacy, and there is reason to hope that the annals of our land may yet be a glorious illustration of the truth of God, that *righteousness exalteth a nation.*